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New UM grant promotes American Indian pharmacists, health care

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The University of
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NEWS RELEASE

Oct. 26, 2004

Contact: Lori Morin, assistant dean for student affairs, UM School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences, (406) 243-4080.

NEW UM GRANT PROMOTES AMERICAN INDIAN PHARMACISTS, HEALTH CARE

MISSOULA —

The University of Montana has been awarded a three-year, \$890,000 grant aimed at increasing the number of American Indian pharmacy students and faculty members.

The grant was presented by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration to UM's School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences. The funding will continue a Native American Center of Excellence at UM.

"American Indians make up about 6 percent of our state's population, but we aren't anywhere near that for pharmacists in Montana," said Lori Morin, the pharmacy school's assistant dean for student affairs. "With the diversity programs we have in place, UM has become a leader in producing Native pharmacists, and this grant shows our efforts are being recognized at the national level."

The Native American Center of Excellence works to increase the number of American Indian and Alaska native pharmacy students and professors nationwide. It will use the new grant to improve health care delivery to Native populations through better professional preparation. In addition, the center will promote cultural competence regarding Indian issues for all pharmacy students.

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Morin said the center will strive to retain Native students through tutoring, individual advising, schedule changes and referral to a variety of campus-based resources. It also will provide on-site coaching, mentoring and materials for new Indian clinical faculty members.

She said the center will establish a new library focused on Indian medicine, culture and health issues. The pharmacy school also will incorporate more Indian cultural concepts into its individual courses -- an idea that complements UM's Native American Healthcare Issues course, which was started using a past grant. In addition, the school will start a diversity club to bolster and encourage its minority students.

"The new center also will guide some of our research," Morin said. "One area we haven't paid enough attention to, for instance, is the racial differences in disease states."

She said the grant will provide stipends to Indian student researchers, encouraging them to complete their own research projects.

Morin said the Center for Excellence dovetails nicely with the pharmacy school's efforts to increase the number of disadvantaged students pursuing careers in pharmacy, physical therapy and allied health science fields. As an example, the Residential Enrichment Activities for Careers in Health program brings high school students to UM to experience health-science academics and campus life.

For more information, call the UM pharmacy school at (406) 243-4621.

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